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ABSTRACT

Management theory can be applied to small colleges. This paper deals with the unique characteristics of a small college and reviews the basic elements of a modern management system. The development of the program at the Colorado School of Mines is used as a case history to illustrate how management principles can be adopted to a small college. A distinction is made between the operation of a formalized management system and its development. (Author/LFB)

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STUDENT AFFAIRS MANAGEMENT IN A SMALL COLLEGE

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INTRODUCTION

Perhaps my situation is unusual, but I doubt that it is in small college circles. I applied for the job of Dean of Students because I am interested in working with students. As a member of the faculty, I knew many of the problems facing the college and had some ideas about how to make things run better. When I finally got the job, I found that some of my ideas worked and some did not; but by and large, my ability to communicate with the students and my programming ideas were relatively successful. What I didn't see from the academic side of the fence was the myriad of administrative details and management skills which would also be required by the job and for which there was no precedent. I found that it is quite different to relate to individuals as peers and as the boss. In this respect, I was no worse off than most of the other administrators in the college, who had also come from the academic ranks with no formal training in personnel management or organizational theory.

Three weeks after being appointed Dean of Students, I had my first contact with NASPA at the 1974 National meeting at Chicago, which was, as you may recall, a genuine three ring circus. In my bewilderment, I latched onto the acronym MBO and a skelton of organizational theory with which to start my education. Avidly, I gobbled up seminars, conference sessions, papers, and articles in the NASPA journal, looking for an appropriate model for a special purpose, technical college in Colorado. The search was frustrated by the fact that most of the presentations and articles were authored by organization theorists, whose broad sweeping assumptions provided inspirational food for thought, but were devoid of nuts and bolts; or by administrators from large universities, who, because of the size and character of the organization they represented, were talking about a different problem than the one I faced.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A SMALL COLLEGE

As you will see later, management theory can be applied to the small college - and probably should be - if you are facing the same budget crunch that we are at Colorado School of Mines. An appropriate place to start, however, is by defining the features which distinguish a small college, at least for the purposes of student affairs management. From an organizational standpoint, we can consider a college small if, in the Student Affairs area, it has one-person departments, i.e. one professional staff member and one or more secretaries. With this as a guideline, one can make certain generalizations which will focus attention on the problems faced by student affairs managers in small colleges and identify a plan by which management can be improved.

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First, let's look at some of the characteristics of the organizational structure of a typical small college.

Individualized Organizational Structure

Regardless how small or informal the college, there will be some organizational structure. There will be a Dean of Students, a Registrar, and presumably a Director of Admissions. In the small colleges, the other job functions commonly associated with Student Affairs might be carried as an additional duty by some of the above officers. Although variations in organizational structure will exist at the large universities, by and large, there will be separate units identified with each major function performed by Student Affairs: Dean of Students, Records, Admissions, Financial Aid, Counseling, Student Activities, Housing, Foreign Student Affairs, etc. In a small college, most of these same functions have to be performed, but by a much smaller staff. Therefore, most staff members wear more than one hat. The evolution of the organizational structure will depend strongly upon the interests and abilities of the individual staff members and there will be more variation in the organizational structure between small colleges than large institutions.

This situation can lead to some organizational problems. If a staff member has total responsibility for a given area, he or she becomes indispensible to the organization, because this person has operational as well as management responsibilities in that area. To compensate for this situation, secretaries are frequently given job responsibilities which are restricted to professional staff at large universities.

If a staff person also has multiple responsibilities, not only is he/she indispensible, the position he or she fills cannot readily be filled when it is vacated, because it is difficult to find another person with that combination of skills. Furthermore, some jobs may be performed well, while others tend to be neglected. It is difficult to criticize a person for doing one part of his assignment poorly when he does another part well, particularly when the job being neglected is the one which is of lesser interest to the individual.

The retirement or termination of a person with multiple job responsibilities may force reorganization in order to utilize the skills and experience of the new staff member.

In summary, when compared to a university, small colleges have a more varied organizational structure, and the structure is more personalized. Individuals have more diverse responsibilities, tend to be more indispensible to a given job and are more difficult to replace. Managers are more involved in the operational aspects of their offices.

Modern Management and Information Systems

The economic benefits of introducing modern management systems or expensive computerized records systems may not be justified in a small college. Even if they can be justified, in many cases the money is no longer available to implement them. For many Student Affairs groups, implementation of these systems is the only way that they will be able to cope with the pressures of the next decade. This realization provides the impetus for looking at the existing system and planning for its reorganization and modernization.

Management Training

In a university, the senior positions in Student Affairs will normally be filled by persons who have worked their way up the administrative ladder. Exposure to the organizational structure and management style of previous supervisors will provide a basis for their management training.

In the small college, senior positions are much more likely to be filled by persons with little or no management experience. If the job combines operational and management responsibilities, it is easy for a neophyte to neglect the management responsibilities and become preoccupied with details.

Student Affairs Staffing

There are advantages and disadvantages to working at a small college. Awareness of these factors which provide the incentives for optimum staff performance is important to good personnel management.

Advantages

1. Job requirements are less stringent. A university will be more specific in degree and job experience requirements when filling a position.
2. More variety in responsibilities; therefore good experience for a young professional seeking wide exposure to all facets of student affairs.
3. More personal recognition, acquaintance with the whole academic community. It's easy to get lost in a large university.
4. More relaxed atmosphere. Professional competition, tenure evaluations, etc. are relatively rare at the small college.
5. Less inertia to changes in the program. Small staff, small budget, and direct contact with all affected parties make changes easier to accomplish.

Disadvantages

1. Lower pay. Salaries are usually lower at small colleges, but frequently living costs are also lower.

2. Less prestige, less responsibility. With fewer people to manage, smaller budgets, less stringent job requirements, the small college administrator is not given as much professional recognition as the university counterpart.
3. Fewer professional opportunities within the organization, because there are fewer positions on the professional ladder. In a one person office, you have to change jobs to get a promotion.
4. Less money and time for professional society responsibilities. In four years, I have served as Dean of Students, Foreign Student Advisor, Placement Director, Cooperative Education Coordinator, and Scholarship Chairman. I am the institutional representative to three distinctly different professional organizations, NASPA, NAFSA, and CPC. It's difficult to get involved in one without neglecting the others.

To keep good professionals, it is necessary to provide opportunities for professional development, trying out new ideas, expanding responsibilities. Money for merit raises will probably not be available in Student Affairs, unless you unionize.

Undoubtedly, you can think of other ways in which small colleges differ from universities. If so, I would like to add your ideas to my list. At this time, it is appropriate to look at the fundamentals of organizational and personnel management so that we can relate them to the realities of small college life that have just been listed.

MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

Since you have attended this session, you presumably have an interest in Student Affairs Management. When a similar presentation was made at the regional NASPA conference in Albuquerque last fall, I handed out a questionnaire which helped the participants identify the elements of a management system which were currently in existence, and hopefully operational, at their institutions. I will be handing out the same questionnaire in a few minutes for your use in order to allow you to evaluate the status of your organization, provide a basis for questions.

Since it can be assumed that you are all acquainted with one or more of the elements of a "management system" the purpose of this portion of the presentation is to summarize all those elements, to place them in perspective, and to demonstrate the interrelation between them. I have found that the operation of an organized management system and laying the groundwork for developing the system are two quite different things. Again, I will summarize the ingredients first so that when I discuss how I got started, you will have some idea of where I am going.

I must first put to rest the pro- and anti-management systems argument, since the implementation of various management systems in student affairs has evoked heated debate in recent years, as it has in many other organizational structures. I am not a management specialist, but rather a practitioner who, as I stated earlier, is simply looking for an effective way of organizing my management responsibilities so that they can be handled efficiently and effectively. I do not, therefore, have any strong opinions as to the optimum management system, whether it be MBO, PPBS, OD, or one of the other acronyms. I do, however, support the idea that some type of system makes sense.

The arguments against the use of modern management techniques stemmed from two primary arguments. First, Higher Education is not a business and hence, business practices and concepts do not apply. I feel that the recent drive for accountability in higher education has forced us to respond to our sponsors in a business-like manner, regardless how we see ourselves. As I will show later, when you are dealing with limited resources, accountability can be a valuable tool for making an administrative decision on the division of those resources.

The second argument is that management systems cost too much, generating more paperwork and consuming more time than they are worth. It seems that every external agency that has some claim on our time is requiring the generation of data and reports for their use. We might as well put that information to use. As I will show, much of the extra paperwork that I found in the management system we adopted is associated with the start-up phase, which does definitely require an extra commitment of resources.

In summary, I am not arguing for the use of any particular management system, but suggesting that some organized approach to management is desirable and probably necessary these days. If you can agree with me on that point, let's look at the basic elements of a management system and see why they are necessary.

Management can be defined as the combining of resources and activities in such a way as to produce a desired outcome. The specific elements may be listed as follows:

1. Assessing needs
2. Defining goals (objectives)
3. Selecting courses of action
4. Assigning resources (people, money, facilities, equipment, time)
5. Supervising activities
6. Monitoring results (evaluation)
7. Planning for the future

These various components are all vital to an effective management system. If one or more is missing, the organization will suffer to a certain extent - as well as

the people in it. I think of these elements as linked to each other in a cyclic relationship, which is commonly linked to the budgetary process. If an element is missing, the cycle will not be complete and forward progress will be impeded. Let's look at the elements in more detail.

Assessing Needs

This activity responds to the need for a purpose for the organization. A sense of purpose can be described as the energy behind the organization. Employees who lack a sense of purpose in their job tend to lack motivation. Similarly, an organization that lacks a sense of purpose - or is a collection of conflicting purposes - cannot survive in today's climate of limited resources and accountability.

Defining Goals

An organization cannot be everything to everyone. The conflicting demands made on the resources of the organization require that the purpose established by the needs assessment be clarified by a set of goals. If purpose is analagous to energy, then goals provide direction, or focus, to that energy.

People work better when they know what is expected of them. Shared goals lead to reinforcement between the efforts of various members of the organization rather than working at cross purposes.

Selecting Courses of Action

If the MBO model may be used for a minute, goals are long-term direction for the efforts of your organization. In order to implement a program to work toward those goals, a series of specific objectives or activities must be defined so that performance and progress can be periodically evaluated.

Assigning Resources

In the vernacular, this is budgeting. Obviously, our most important resource is people, i.e. FTE's and a set of skills which are the result of training and experience. Even more specifically, we mean the right people to do the right job.

Often our problems as managers are not so much a question of more positions, but rather making the most effective use of those we have. This is true not only for people, but also the other resources that they need in order to do their work - equipment, facilities, and supplies.

Supervising Activities and Monitoring Results

Both of these functions involve the use of feedback, i.e. information a system or an organization provides for itself. Feedback allows for change or corrective action to take place. By and large, supervising involves short-term feedback on a daily or weekly basis, while monitoring results refers more directly to a formal

evaluation process which would occur once or twice within a given management cycle.

Again, not only does an organization need feedback in order to determine that it is progressing toward its goals, but the people in the organization do as well. People need encouragement along the way. They need to know to what extent they have accomplished their goals and the value of their contributions if they are to change and grow in their work.

Planning for the Future

The cycle is closed when the feedback from all the previous elements are combined to planning the next cycle. Evaluation rarely suggests that things are perfect. We may have misread the needs of our students, or set goals to high or too low. We may need a different combination of resources to get the job done. Based on the evaluation, the management cycle is initiated again with new plans for the future.

It is important to note that elements 2, 3, and 7 involve planning. Four and 5 can be considered operation, 6 evaluation, and 1 data collection. Too often the planning occurs haphazardly or in a reactive rather than proactive manner. It requires foresight on the part of the manager to provide planning far enough in the future to clearly define the long term goals of the organization. Here again, the integration of staff into the planning process is important for staff morale. The time for management to make independent decisions is at the time of evaluation and assigning resources. For effective management, planning is a group process.

DEVELOPING A MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

As I indicated earlier, I assumed, along with the Dean of Students position, a management assignment broader than I realized and for which I had no formal training. In fact, the entire Student Affairs Office was reorganized at that time and put under my supervision. It consisted of the Dean of Students, the Director and Assistant Director of Admissions, and a fourth staff person who served as Registrar and Financial Aid Officer. Prior to my appointment, each officer reported separately to the Vice President for Academic Affairs. It was decided that I should reduce his supervisory responsibility by serving as administrative head for Student Affairs, so that the other offices would report to the Vice President through me.

At the time I started as Dean, we added a new staff position, a full-time Counselor-Placement Officer. With exception of the Counselor, all the rest of the staff, including the senior secretaries, had been in their jobs for several years. The Director of Admissions was a year from retirement, so a new assistant director was hired to take over his position at the end of the year.

My immediate problem was that each office was autonomous and needed little supervision from me, particularly since I was the neophyte in student affairs. I had enough to do just learning my own job, without trying to learn everyone else's and assert administrative control over seemingly smoothly-functioning operations. My initial efforts at providing group cohesion via an all-day planning meeting and staff meetings which included the secretaries were little more than window-dressing. However, they did bring out in the open certain facts which needed clarification.

The first one was that if I was going to assume authority, it had to be clear where my authority came from and how far it extended. Some staff members found it easy to accept that I was boss. Others resented it. In those cases it was necessary to obtain reinforcement from the Vice President as to what my responsibilities were. The most significant one was that I am responsible for the annual performance review for the other members of the Student Affairs staff. This meant that I needed to know what they were doing and what they were supposed to be doing - not always the same thing. Also, I had to make sure that what I thought they were supposed to be doing was, in fact, really their job. This led to the second requirement. I had to have proper job descriptions for each position. In one case, the staff member and I never did completely agree what his job was; as a result he finally left.

The job description, however, did not tell the whole story. One of my primary goals in Student Affairs is the development of a multi-purpose, computerized student records system - one over which student affairs officers will have direct control of data entry and retrieval and which can be enlarged to support admissions, scholarships, financial aid and registration, including the numerous reporting responsibilities associated with those operations. Since the computerized records are currently handled by an ADP group who reports to the Vice President for Business, they are relatively inaccessible and programming efforts are directed toward records maintenance rather than support for the operations which generate the records.

The squabble between Academic and Business Affairs over the proper maintenance of computerized records dates back to the days of the abbaccus, and its resolution did not appear to be in sight. Finally, in desperation, the Vice President for Academic Affairs - my boss - hired a consultant to work with the ADP group and straighten out, and possibly rewrite, the student records programs so that we could move toward the system we desire. The Academic Vice President's need was simple - he wanted correct reports.

The consultant discovered a funny thing. He couldn't design a program to fit our operational needs because we could not document for him how anything was done. He confirmed what we had suspected all along, the place was run by the secretaries. When

a piece of information or report was needed by a student affairs officer, his secretary would call the appropriate secretary and it would be dug out. If the data didn't fit or was not in the right form, the secretaries would resolve the issue themselves. If the result was a change in policy, it might go unnoticed for a year or more, by which time it was 'the way we've always done it'.

The consultant abandoned the programming task and set about getting detailed job descriptions, followed by written operational procedures for each desk in the Student Affairs Office. It was a monumental task, requiring many hours effort on the part of most everyone in Student Affairs. Needless to say, there were complaints. Here again, it worked because the Vice President said, "Do it!" Without his support, and a well-organized program of management review designed by the consultant, the job would probably never have been done. There is still one report which has never been finished, because I haven't pushed for it. It's on my 'to do' list.

With the job descriptions and procedures in hand, I was in a better position to assert my position as manager. I had a basis for evaluating performance of my staff. Working from the operational procedures, it was possible to map out six month and one year objectives, with quantifiable outcomes and documented evaluation procedures. Since each staff member was jointly responsible for establishing his/her job description and operational procedures, as well as semiarnual objectives, the basis for evaluation is fairly clearcut, and I have been able to give uniformly good recommendations. In those areas where performance objectives have not been met, i didn't have to tell the person. He knew that he hadn't reached his goal and knew why. Normally, it was for a valid reason.

The one area in staff evaluation in which I am still uneasy is evaluating staff performance as supervisors. It is difficult to go to secretaries and ask for a rating of their boss, or to make a valid assessment from the outside.

The other areas in which I finally asserted my authority was in staff assignment and budget. Since our student body is growing fairly steadily, we have added an average of one staff member a year since I have been Dean. Two of those positions, the Counselor and the Registrar - the former Registrar became full-time Financial Aid Officer - were approved by the administration. The secretarial positions, however, were added by virtue of presenting a joint request to the administration and resulted in an internal decision as to where the new position would go. Ultimately, I made that decision. This gave me the opportunity to require documentation and justification for the need between two competing departments - in this case, Admissions and the Registrar. Suddenly, time became available to do the necessary studies and put together the numbers to show why the position was needed. This not only helped me in my decision, but made

it easier to submit a request for an additional secretary for next year. The documentation, by the way, was on the basis of the number of students served, number of transcripts or admissions applications processed, etc.

With the organizational problems under control, there was finally time to define the mission or purpose of the Student Affairs Department. We agreed that the purpose statement should support the academic program, i.e. "The purpose of the Student Affairs Office is to develop an environment on campus which permits and encourages each student to optimize classroom learning." To do otherwise, is to endanger the entire Student Affairs programming effort at a time of budget cutbacks. Programs such as student activities, counseling, and health care may be considered unnecessary if they are not related to the academic mission of the college as a whole.

With the purpose statement in hand, the organizational structure can be reviewed and, if necessary, defended. Again, in the small college, the division of responsibility may be based on history rather than logic. At Mines, for instance, student housing and the health service have historically reported to the Vice President for Business, because they involve auxiliary enterprises and the collection of fees. The people problems associated with the management of these operations were considered minor compared to the money problems. To date, I have convinced the administration that the people problems associated with administering the health service are more critical in nature than the money problems, so it has been placed under my control. With this accomplished, it was then possible to coordinate the counseling and health service, which had previously been at loggerheads because of professional incompatibility. Perhaps student housing will eventually be joined with Student Affairs, although I do not see it happening soon.

What is the basis for deciding whether an operation belongs in Student Affairs or not? The answer is that the operation must fit within the purpose statement of the office. I am trying to get rid of responsibility for the Student-Faculty Directory, since it is now generated by a computer tape produced by ADP, which is in Business Affairs, and contracted by the Printing Office, which is under Public Relations. I have fiscal responsibility for an activity over which I have no operational control. This type of situation can cause ulcers.

I still find it difficult to take the time to be a good manager. As we saw earlier, three of the seven elements involve planning. It is too easy to get preoccupied with student problems, a new study my boss wants, or taking care of paper work. The only solution, it appears, is to set aside time for dealing with management problems. This year, I do not take any appointments before 9:00 a.m. The first hour is mine to use for writing, reading, preparing proposals, and staff review. I would

like to say that I have the use of that hour planned well in advance, but I don't. As a teacher, my time, like a student's, was planned for me. I had to meet certain classes, and had to have so much time for preparation. As the Dean, my time management rests much more directly on my own shoulders. It has been a difficult lesson to learn; but without it, organizational and personnel management go out the window.

In summary, the elements of management boil down to the same steps for everyone, large or small: Job descriptions, operational procedures, performance objectives, staff evaluation, and resource management. Although they're not hard to learn, in a small college they seem more difficult to justify. But the need for them will become apparent if you see the symptoms of poor management: policy set by secretaries, management by crisis rather than by plan, lack of a clear consensus of departmental direction, interdepartmental squabbling, rapid staff turnover, difficulty in defending budget and staffing requests.

In a time when every college administration is looking for places to cut costs, Student Affairs is vulnerable. Any of these signs of weakness in management will provide an opportunity for the administration to cut back on a program where problems exist, or combine a function with another department - such as business, housing, etc. - where the management is strong. That saves on administrative costs and eliminates a problem. The danger of that happening to your organization can be avoided if time and resources are devoted to developing a proper management system.

Naturally, staff are wary of the introduction of a new system, particularly if it involves performance-based evaluation. Therefore, any effort in this direction requires support from the top of the administration and full participation of your staff at each step in its implementation. In the long run, I feel the effort has been worthwhile at Mines. I am more confident that we all know where we are going, staff morale is high, we are working better as a team, and I now have more time to devote to the job I like best, being the Dean of Students.

STUDENT AFFAIRS MANAGEMENT IN A SMALL COLLEGE

PROGRAM EVALUATION RESULTS

The following replies were given on the program evaluation forms distributed at the National NASPA Conference:

1. What percentage of your time do you spend on management, i.e. supervision and planning?

   11 - 10% 16 - 25% 13 - 50% 8 - 75%

2. Which, if any, of the following are available to you at the present time for review and use in planning?

a. organizational chart	42 yes	5 no
b. statement of organizational purpose	34 yes	14 no
c. list of job descriptions:		
professional staff	41 yes	5 no
clerical staff	41 yes	5 no
d. operational procedures	18 yes	29 no
e. operational calender	24 yes	23 no
f. employees manual	22 yes	25 no

3. Do you engage in periodic needs assessment of your clientele? 29 yes 17 no

4. Do you have a goal/purpose statement for Student Affairs? 29 yes 17 no

5. Do you have a formal program evaluation and planning procedure in Student Affairs? 14 yes 33 no

6. Who is responsible for budget development in Student Affairs?

Chief Administrative Officer	1
Controller	1
Coordinator of Student Personnel and each department	1
Dean of Students	16
Dean of Students & Department Heads	1
Dean of Students & Directors	1
Dean of Students & President	2
Dean of Students & 2 Assistant Deans	1
Dean of Student Affairs/Services/Life	5
Director	1
Director and President	1
Student Affairs Administrator	1
Vice President & Directors	1
Vice President & Staff	1
Vice President Business Affairs	1
Vice President Student Affairs	3
Vice President Student Affairs & Directors	1
Vice President Student Life & Staff	1
Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Life	1
Staff	1

7. Who would make the decision on Student Affairs staff reduction or increase at your institution?

Business Manager	1
Chancellor	1
Chief Administrative Officer	1
Dean of Student Affairs	18
Director of Student Housing	1
Personnel Committee	1
President	22
Vice President for Student Affairs	8

8. When was the last major review of the organizational structure in Student Affairs?

unknown - 4 1977 - 20 1976 - 23 1975 - 5 1974 - 4

9. Have administrative staff at your college been given formal management training?

13 - yes 32 - no

10. Are the secretaries in Student Affairs given responsibility that is normally carried by professional staff at a university?

27 - yes 20 - no

11. Which, if any, of your professional staff have more than one major job responsibility? (e.g. Registrar and Financial Aid)

7	one major job responsibility
36	more than one major job responsibility
4	no reply

12. Do you have performance objectives for the various offices in Student Affairs?

22 - yes 23 - no

13. Do you have a formal evaluation procedure for staff in Student Affairs?

24 - yes 22 - no

14. How often do you have a formal staff performance review?

25	yearly
4	twice per year
2	three per year
1	four per year
1	monthly
1	weekly
1	irregularly
2	seldom
5	never
5	no reply

15. Schools with attendance up to 1000 students - 20

Schools with attendance from 1001 up - 23